

Apr 19th, 12:00 AM

IATUL and the future

Dennis Shaw
University of Oxford

Dennis Shaw, "IATUL and the future." *Proceedings of the IATUL Conferences*. Paper 24.
<https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/iatul/1985/papers/24>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries.
Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

IATUL AND THE FUTURE

Dennis Shaw

Keeper of Scientific Books
Radcliffe Science Library
University of Oxford, U.K.

Introduction

When I was invited to give this concluding lecture at our 11th biennial conference the Board of IATUL instructed me to survey the proceedings and to highlight the important pointers to the future of information resources for science and technology with particular reference to the next few years in the IATUL programme.

In formulating the programme, the members of the Conference Committee had the task of identifying those issues which were relevant and likely to interest the members. The extent to which this selection was a success is shown by the number and quality of papers which have been presented. It is an important feature of our Association that our biennial conferences provide a forum for representatives of member institutions to present their views on matters of current concern. This conference has set a new landmark for IATUL in the number of countries, both represented among the delegates and also contributing papers. Papers were read by delegates from the following fifteen countries: Australia, Belgium, Canada, East Germany, England, Finland, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Netherlands, Sweden, United States of America, West Germany, Yugoslavia. Participants have enrolled from twenty-two countries, which in addition to those above included Brazil, France, Italy, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, and we have representatives from all continents of the world. However, the majority of papers and delegates have come from Europe and North America. One of our tasks for the future must be to broaden our international base, particularly in Asia, Africa and South America.

The Conference Theme

The development and presentation of our conference theme was particularly interesting. The selection of invited speakers and their chosen topics contributed much to the emphasis placed on particular themes. The programme was divided deliberately into major themes to encourage participants to concentrate on particular topics not always selected for conference presentations.

Industrial and Commercial Use of Information

The conference opened with a selection of papers on the industrial and commercial use of information resources from Finland (Professor Törnudd), U.S.A. (Mrs. Richards and Mr. Widdicombe), F.R.G. (Dr. Wehefritz and Dr. Fellmann), and Hungary (Mrs. Dömötör and Dr. Zsidai). This brought into perspective the first lesson from our conference: the issue of revenue earning services, which is so important for libraries in the current era of slender funding. Later in the conference a paper from the U.K. (Mr.

Warren), highlighted the changes which have occurred in Britain on the industrial information scene in the last twenty years and emphasized the crucial significance of cost-effectiveness in information services for the private sector. The importance of this theme for IATUL is demonstrated by the decision to devote the next biennial conference in Helsinki in 1987 to give further consideration to these problems.

This theme was expanded in the next session which was devoted to aspects of the balance between resources in the public and private sectors. The Canadian scene was chosen for an invited lecture by Mr. E.V. Smith. He gave us a globe-stretching review of the scientific and technical information services in the second largest land area of any country in the world. Distances there are huge, as anyone who has crossed Canada knows all too well. The importance of the political framework within which we all operate was emphasized and this was a theme which assumed greater significance later in the conference (see page 143). The Canadian policy is of interest to those who operate in a free-market situation as well as those from countries where the national economy is planned and controlled centrally: it provides (a) equal access to information resources regardless of geographical location and (b) a distribution service with equalized charges across the continent.

The contrast in this session was provided by papers from Finland (Dr. Koskiala) and Japan (Professor Chiku). One of the important topics introduced by these speakers was the development of full-text databases. The importance of the English language is paramount in technology and scientific information exchange, and the presentation of the Fujitsu automatic translation system ATRAS was of particular relevance in this context. We look forward with interest to further news of this development. Preliminary discussions have been conducted with Kanazawa Institute of Technology with a view to holding an IATUL conference there in 1989.

Local Access to Information

In focussing our attention on local access to information resources we had contributions from Malaysia (Mr. Syed), Australia (Mr. Kelman), and Israel (Mrs. Roitberg). The emphasis in Malaysia is, of course, on agriculture, fisheries and rubber technology. The best libraries are in the universities and colleges, which augurs well for a viable and profitable information service. However, the back-up services are 'not very good' to use Mr. Syed's own words and 'something is wrong with the role of professionals and current attitudes'. Perhaps the lesson to be learnt is the one discovered in the U.S.A. and Europe - that you must educate your library customers to use the services effectively and productively. Many of the databases now available in S.E. Asia and Malaysia are of world value. Rationalisation and international co-operation must be fostered to enable full use to be made of these resources. This is one of IATUL's principal objectives and we must take note of this and ensure that ways of implementation are found during the conference follow-up period.

The situation in Australia shows some similarity to the Malaysian scene where in the western continental territory there is a large number of small industrial units. An area of 2.5 million square kilometres has a population of only 1.3 million. As in Canada distances are great and the population density is very low. There is a substantial need for an electronic document distribution service or facsimile transmission on-line. The scale of the problem is so large that it will have to be managed centrally by the government of the State.

The extension of library services in Israel was explained by Mrs. Roitberg to have been restricted during the last few years by budgeting limitations. The country is remote from the major Western resource centres and, therefore, must rely in future on electronic data transmission services. The production of union catalogues of Israeli-held resources is part of the service to be supplied by one automated library system ALEPH which has a bilingual (English/Hebrew) command structure in its software. One looks forward to hearing at a future conference how this develops as a local system for use throughout the country.

Access to Information in Electronic Form

The discussions following these contributions led naturally to one of the major themes of the conference 'Access to information in electronic form'. Nearly every major conference of librarians and information scientists nowadays is devoted (at least in part) to this topic. There is a risk that talking about the problems will be allowed to replace serious attempts to solve them. However, it became clear during the sessions devoted to digital electronic information services that not all the librarians or their users were currently demanding solutions to all the problems raised. User demand must be the market force which determines the direction and speed of developments in, and applications of, information technology. The main contributions to the theme were given in invited lectures by Dr. Appleyard, DG XIII, Commission of European Communities, and Mr. ter Haar, Chairman of Elsevier. Dr. Appleyard, in presenting the European programme for developing and implementing the new information technologies emphasised the role that libraries can fulfil in the emerging market. There are several important facets to this for IATUL and many of our members in Europe are already aware of the potential of Euronet for on-line access to databases. The DOCDEL project will be monitored with interest although it is primarily designed to foster developments in the private sector - which generally excludes us. However, APOLLO is likely to affect us - or at least our customers. It will be important to look for benefits and improved services. We should consider whether or not those of us who form a major European user-group of documents from BLLD and TIB should become more active in development trials. In this, as in most other pioneering activities in applying information technology, most of our libraries lack the funds and staff needed to support such experiments. This is an important subject which merits further study at a future seminar or possibly consideration at our next conference in 1987.

The Future for the Scientific Journal and Electronic Publishing

The review of the recent history of scientific journal publishing by Mr. ter Haar, showed the importance of the IATUL project - adopted last year - on journal usage. The co-operation between our members has started with an exchange of union lists of current serial titles. We now need to find a cheap and reliable method for scanning and analysing these lists to establish the patterns of changes in holdings. Data on use of journals by readers are essential for these studies and methods are being studied in Oxford to test some new ideas for measuring journal usage. We shall devote the next year or two to studying the literature in certain broad subject areas such as chemistry and the biological sciences and we hope to work out an international collaboration through IATUL. Chalmers University of Technology has expressed an interest in looking at the literature of the engineering sciences. Members with recent data on use in these subject areas are invited to contact the author with a view to contributing to this study. If sufficient comes out of this we plan to publish the results in a future issue of IATUL Proceedings.

Mr. ter Haar's conclusion from his survey of the history of the past fifteen years of journal publishing, complement in some respects Mr. Lambie's experience at Bath University in the SWIRL project. The interest and importance of scientific and technological expertise is unending and there is no limit to the potential demand for disseminating the results of scientific research. But, there are constraints the majority of which are closely linked to economic factors. We are certainly encouraged by the prospect of a more nearly static situation in journal publication. We must be alert to the challenge of electronic information transfer, which could by-pass the library system as it is currently organised in the majority of our members' institutions. But the changes will take place much more slowly than the 'optimists' have predicted and we have sufficient experience of the electronic publishing era to be confident that there is little risk of a crucial or catastrophic change in emphasis during the next fifteen years.

The major contributions on this theme from members and others were from the U.K. and U.S.A.. Dr. Jagodzinski focussed attention on the vital role of the man-machine interface in the development of user-friendly systems. Dr. Michalak reminded us that libraries must integrate electronic media into their information services in order that resources are exploited fully. The pioneering development at Carnegie-Mellon University is designed to enable users with their own personal computers access to a wide range of information services. Let us hope his prediction is right that such developments will increase the importance of the library both as a central source of information and as a source of assistance to users.

Dr. Oppenheim, in his survey of the Pergamon InfoLine plans for on-line information services, predicted that expert systems will gradually take over many of the traditional roles of our libraries. As with some of Mr. ter Haar's observations we are left wondering to what extent future prognoses are related to plans rather than extrapolated from experience. We must, however, agree with them that IATUL members must take note of such developments and monitor their use in our institutions. We must plan to exchange information on this in future.

The Future of 'Grey' Literature

The future of grey literature in the context of electronic databases is an important topic which attracted contributions from the U.K. (Mr. Hill) and the Netherlands (Dr. van der Meer). Mr. Hill's survey of the international collaboration between the European, Japanese and U.S. patent offices emphasised the future role of the video disk for mass storage of vast quantities of documentation. It also helped to concentrate our minds on the importance of planning for new services and different solutions in the future. Patent services will grow in importance in universities as they become more interested in the commercial application of fundamental discoveries in science and technology.

Dr. van der Meer drew our attention to the problems of locating the various elements of grey literature in a database and the Netherlands has built up a co-operation with NTIS in U.S.A. to overcome some of these difficulties. The admirable qualities of the European database SIGLE should be more widely known and it is to be hoped that these two services may be enhanced in future by closer collaboration.

Information Access in an Electronic Age: Central Planning versus Free Enterprise

There was an interesting frank exchange of opinion at our symposium on the theme of information access in an electronic age in which a comparison was made between the centrally planned economy and a free enterprise situation. The seven questions posed by Dr. Line to our four invited participants from East Germany (Dr. Schmidmaier), Hungary (Mrs. Dömötör and Dr. Zsidai), and Yugoslavia (Mrs. Čučnik-Majcen) stimulated some interesting observations. In Western Countries we know very little about the information available in databases in Eastern Europe. It is to be hoped that IATUL will be able to increase its knowledge in this area by widening its membership and encouraging more information exchange. Our next conference in Helsinki may give us an opportunity to develop this. Perhaps a visit can be arranged to Leningrad by invitation of the Academy of Sciences. There are undoubted theoretical advantages in central planning for electronic storage of information and access control but where is the evidence that these advantages are practically realisable?

Conclusion

The Secretary of the IFLA Section of Science and Technological Libraries (Ms. Franziska Heinzle) emphasized her desire to see a strengthening of the collaboration between IFLA and IATUL. We are already working closely with FID through the active participation of its President (Mr. Hill) and other senior members, particularly Mr. E.V. Smith who is the Canadian Chairman for the 43rd FID Congress in Montreal in September 1985.

Looking to the future, we must strengthen our membership in Eastern Europe and Asia where we have so few representatives. Also, we need to encourage more interest from universities in Third World countries. We should seek assistance from UNESCO and get our activities included in its rolling programme. Finally, it is to be hoped that we may build up our association with ICSU and share its programme of work on the distribution and publication of scientific information.